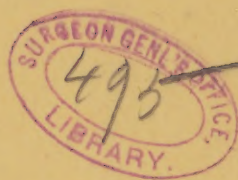


WILLIAMS (T.)

Pain & Shock.



Williams (J.)

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PAIN AND SHOCK.

To the Editor of THE MEDICAL NEWS.

SIR: To the layman there are few medico-lay topics, if I may coin the word, which are of more interest than the relative amount of pain felt by individuals and races. A great deal of writing, most of it sentimental, but part of it pseudo-scientific, assumes that the capacity to suffer pain exists with tolerable equality in the different ranges of life, after the nervous system is developed at all, and that in man pain has been felt equally at different historic periods, and in different races of the same period. A great deal of the discussion on the ameliorating consequences of the use of chloroform and ether has, for instance, as its assumed premise, the implied assertion that the subjects under the knife of Paré, at the battle of Pavia, were conscious of as much pain as the subjects on the operating-table at Gettysburg.

It has occurred to me, perhaps wrongly, that the extent to which patients suffer from shock under surgical operations is a tolerably fair gauge of the measure of nervous disturbance created by the operation, and this in its turn is but another name for pain. I was familiar in childhood with the fact that missionary surgeons in Southeast Turkey paid little or no attention to shock in their operations, or, to be more accurate, I never heard any allusion to shock as a thing to be considered at all. Dr. Henry West, one of the most skilful and distinguished of the many men who have dedicated great ability to the obscure path of medical and surgical work at a missionary station (Livas, Turkey-in-Asia), I know, during a long experience, never found it necessary to



pay any attention to shock in operations upon the natives. I venture to think that the following letter on the subject, which I have received from Dr. V. M. B. Thom, who has established a hospital in Mardin, Turkey, may be of interest to members of the profession in this country, as throwing light on the subject of which I have just spoken.

May I add that Dr. Thom has established the beginnings of a medical school in connection with his hospital, and that any gifts of instruments, of books, and still more of pecuniary aid, will be of the utmost service in the work of this hospital and school, one of the great difficulties of the missionary medical teacher being the extreme poverty of those whom he is endeavoring to train, which prevents them from providing themselves with even the smallest appliances. There are many instruments laid aside for better inventions that might be given a useful term of service on missionary ground if they were contributed for this purpose.

Dr. Thom, after alluding to a question of mine on the subject, says:

"I had forgotten that shock was such a formidable enemy to operations in America. In all my operations in Turkey I do not recall an instance where I had any unfavorable results from shock, and I have had patients on the table for two hours or more, submitting to very trying operations, having all ages, from the year-or-two-old child to the threescore-and-ten or more.

"This winter I removed a very extensive cancer from the breast of a woman that would have been looked upon at home as delicate—not only the loss of an extensive amount of flesh, the loss of blood, and a very great strain upon the system in bringing the edges of the wound together and retaining them there, and yet we had not the indication of shock. Only recently I was called to a case of labor which had been three days in pain. It was an arm presentation, with a narrow pelvis. It was

impossible to deliver the child until I dismembered it, and being dead before I called, I had less compunctions in doing so. Yet the woman showed no evidence of shock. Time and again young brides, of from thirteen to fourteen years of age, will be in labor with their first child from three to five days, until they are all exhausted and worn out, but not an indication of shock. As to exercising any precautions after the operations in putting them to bed, with warm applications to keep up the circulation, or giving internal stimulants, hypodermatic or otherwise, I have never once had to do it."

Respectfully,

TALCOTT WILLIAMS.

